



DEPARTMENT OF THE AIR FORCE
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF CHAPLAIN SERVICE
WASHINGTON D.C.

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MEMORANDUM FOR ALMAJCOM HC, DRU, FOA

FROM: HQ USAF/HC
112 Luke Ave, Ste 319
Bolling AFB DC 20032-9050

SUBJECT: Chaplains Bearing Arms and Noncombatant Status

The chaplains' privileged status as noncombatants is essential to the military chaplaincy. Being a noncombatant is both a way of thinking and a way of acting, which make it clear and unequivocal to everyone that a chaplain is indeed a noncombatant. This way of thinking and acting must be evident in deployed and nondeployed environments.

A chaplain **does not and will not carry a weapon** at any time or under any circumstance. He/she **never transports weapons or ammunition** from one location to another. The simple act of carrying a weapon or ammunition identifies the chaplain as a potential combatant, makes the chaplain a legitimate target of attack, and could constitute a violation of the Law of Armed Combat (LOAC) [cfr. "Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to Protections of International Armed Conflict - Protocol I" dated 8 June 1977, art. 37]. Similar actions can violate the noncombatant status of a chaplain, such as: assisting in planning military actions, conveying military intelligence, directing response to hostile fire, etc. Such acts would clearly identify a chaplain as a combatant and seriously endanger the noncombatant status of other chaplains.

The chaplains' noncombatant status is confirmed further by the Geneva Conventions' emblem and noncombatant identity card. Chaplains both in training exercises and in a combat environment will wear the Geneva Conventions brassard (armband) and carry the Geneva Conventions' Card for Medical and Religious Personnel (DD Form 1934) to identify them as noncombatants.

It is the chaplain's responsibility to advise his/her commander of the restrictions of a noncombatant under which the chaplain must operate. The installation chaplain briefs the commander as to the specific differences between the chaplain's restrictions and those of the medical corps as noncombatants.

It is the policy of the United States Air Force Chaplain Service that under no circumstances may a chaplain ever carry a weapon or transport weapons/ammunition. Further, whenever serving in a combat environment, the chaplain will never remove the Geneva Convention brassard from his/her outer clothing. Moreover, individual chaplains will refrain from any and all activity that could be interpreted as aggressive behavior or compromise the noncombatant status of other chaplains in the United States Armed Forces. Actions inconsistent with this policy constitute a dereliction of duty and a failure to meet Air Force standards with resulting consequences, not excluding any action that may be taken against the chaplain under the provisions of the UCMJ.

LORRAINE K. POTTER
Chaplain, Major General USAF
Chief of the Chaplain Service